

Merritt Parkway, Rocky Hill Road Bridge  
Spanning the Merritt Parkway at the 32.54 mile mark  
Trumbull  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-56

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**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

OTHER  
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# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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## Merritt Parkway, Rocky Hill Road Bridge

HAER No. CT-56

**Location:** Spanning the Merritt Parkway at the 32.54 mile mark in Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.651780.4566335  
Quad: Bridgeport, Connecticut

**Construction Date:** 1935

**Engineer:** Connecticut Highway Department

**Architect:** George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

**Contractor:** Mariani Construction Company  
New Haven, Connecticut

**Present Owner:** Connecticut Department of Transportation  
Wethersfield, Connecticut

**Present Use:** Inactive

**Significance:** The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

**Historians:** Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian  
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer  
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

## LOCAL HISTORY

In 1668, there were only five settlers living beyond the two-mile limit of the Stratford meeting house. Shortly after this date, the land north of Stratford was surveyed, laid out and assigned to individuals. It is unknown if anyone settled there before Abraham Nichols and his family arrived from Stratford in 1690. Other families soon followed, creating a district known as Nichols Farms.<sup>1</sup>

As the population increased, the desire for a local church and government became evident. In 1725, Nichols Farms residents petitioned the General Court for village privileges and a committee was named to view their case. The General Assembly acted in favor of their petition and in October 1725 the Assembly granted the residents of Nichols Farms the "liberty of village privileges," as the Society of Unity. Unity was still a part of Stratford, but could maintain its own meeting house and school, through a local tax.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, residents from Fairfield were clearing lands west of Unity. This area came to be known as the Long Hill region and faced many of the same problems as Nichols Farms. These settlers were forced to pay for a church and school that were too far away for them to use.<sup>3</sup>

In 1740 the General Assembly granted the Long Hill region an exemption from paying taxes for the school and meeting house in Stratfield, between December and mid March. Furthermore, Long Hill was allowed to develop its own meeting house during these months. Thus, the Winter Society of Long Hill was created; this arrangement continued for four years.

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<sup>1</sup>History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 1797-1972, (Trumbull: Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972), 25.

<sup>2</sup>History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 26.

<sup>3</sup>David A. Cronin, "History of Trumbull, Connecticut," Historical Sketches of Trumbull, Connecticut: Tercentury Celebration, (Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Committee, 1935), 5.

In 1744, the parishes of Unity and Long Hill, only five miles apart, were consolidated into the Society of North Stratford. The new society functioned in virtually the same manor as the Unity parish. As they were now allowed to manage their own religious and educational affairs, residents became anxious to obtain complete independence from Stratford. For more than fifty years North Stratford sought to become an individual township. In October 1797, the General Assembly passed the "Trumbull Bill" establishing the Society of North Stratford as the town of Trumbull.<sup>4</sup>

The Boston Post Road and the main line of the railroad both passed to the south of Trumbull, isolating the community as a rural farming region until the completion of the Merritt Parkway in 1940. Trumbull was the location the Connecticut Highway Department's main field office during the construction of the Merritt Parkway.

#### BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

The Rocky Hill Road Bridge was originally erected for a branch line on the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad. In 1939 the Connecticut Public Utilities Commission, "granted permission to abandon that part of the New Haven Rail Road line in Trumbull."<sup>5</sup> Criticism of the bridge arose, because of its \$50,000 cost and the fact that it has never been used.

Frione Construction Company, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from Main Street/Route 25 to the Huntington Turnpike, in Trumbull (ConnDot project #180-02). While the Rocky Hill Road Bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract

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<sup>4</sup>History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 28.

<sup>5</sup>"No Trains for Rail Bridge." New York Times, 29 October 1939, sec. 1, p. 39.

went to the Mariani Construction Company of New Haven, CT.<sup>6</sup> The bridge cost \$51,311 and was completed in 1935.<sup>7</sup> The paving work for this region of the Merritt also extended from the Black Rock Turnpike to Main Street/Route 25. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project #180-102).

Since it was built, the Rocky Hill Road Bridge has received little maintenance, in the mid 1980s several knee braces were removed.<sup>8</sup>

#### BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Rocky Hill Road Bridge is a single-span, plate girder bridge spanning 80' at a skew angle of 32°-54' over the Merritt Parkway. Two 7'-deep plate girders, one considerably thicker than the other, are built up from plates and angles and spaced 15'-5" apart. The girders are pinned to fixed shoes at one abutment and to rockers at the other. Heavy 18"-deep steel wide-flange sections are supported near the bottom flange of the girders at 3' on center spacing. Two 15"-deep steel wide-flange sections act as diaphragms between adjacent beams. A 7" reinforced-concrete slab is supported on this grid. A layer of bricks and a 2" asphalt plank protect the slab from the gravel placed between the girders to support the railroad ties and rails.

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<sup>6</sup>Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

<sup>7</sup>Reservoir Road Bridge, DOT #750; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

<sup>8</sup>Reservoir Road Bridge, DOT #750; Bridge Maintenance File.

Parallel reinforced-concrete wing walls form the approach for the underpass. The three vertical grooves in the pylons complement the web stiffeners of the plate girders. Presently, the bridge is not used, and the backfill of the south wing walls has been removed.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beach, E. Merrill. Trumbull: Church and Town, A History of the Colonial Town of Trumbull and of its Church. Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972.
- Cronin, David A. "History of Trumbull, Connecticut." Historical Sketches of Trumbull, Connecticut: Tercentury Celebration. Trumbull: Trumbull Historical Committee, 1935.
- . History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 1797-1972. Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972.
- . Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.
- . Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

## PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.